THE RABBI MOISES AND THE *PRIMER DEL CRESTIÀ* OF FRANCESC EIXIMENIS

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ABSTRACT

In his *Primer del Crestià*, chapters 117-25, Francesc Eximenis refuted beliefs of a certain "Rabbi Moises" or Maimonides concerning Christian beliefs, especially the claim that Jesus was not the Messiah. The text of Maimonides which particularly upset Eximenis and others in the realms of Aragon, including the royal family and the clergy, was the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, XIV, also called "Shophetim." Eximenis further attempts to negate four major claims of the Rabbi Moises; however, these opinions do not come directly from Maimonides' works but rather from commentaries on his opus and Latin polemic works. The influence of Maimonides is also present in the urgency to rebuke and censor the "Shophetim" and sections of the *Mishneh Torah* which Eximenis found offensive to Christians.

The Franciscan Francesc Eximenis (c. 1327-1409) stands behind Ramon Llull as the most prolific author of medieval Catalan literature. He also served the last three Catalan kings of Aragon and the last pope of Avignon, Benedict XIII, who awarded him the bishopric of Elne. Prior to receiving this distinction Eximenis had written *El Crestià* (*The Christian*), composed of several lengthy treatises, and several treatises in Catalan and Latin for the moral edification of laypersons and the clergy.[1] In the first book of *The Christian, Primer del Crestià*, begun in the 1370s, Eximenis compared Christianity, Judaism and Islam.[2] His ideas on Hebrew works and Jewish writers appear in chapters 117-25 and 206-373.

In the early chapters he refutes the beliefs of "un gran rabbi jueu." Given the force of Eximenis's rebuke and the many objections to the great rabbi's work, my first inclination was to identify the unknown

[1] On Eximenis's life and works, consult Martí de Barcelona, "Fra Francesc Eximenis, O.M. (1340?-1409?): La seva vida, els seus escrits, la seva personalitat literària," *Estudis franciscans*, 40 (1928), 437-500; Andrés Ivars, *El escritor fr. Eximénez en Valencia (1383-1408)*, ed. Pedro Santonja (Benissa: Ayuntamiento de Benissa, Comisión de Cultura, 1989).

[2] *Primer libre del Crestià* (Valencia: L. Palmart, 1483). Further references to this work will appear in the text.

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author and text as Rabbi Moses ha-Kohen de Tordesillas and his *Sefer 'Ezer ha-Emunah*. This work, written around 1379, as the result of a 1375 disputation, sparked further religious polemics in Spain and denied beliefs Eximenis defended in the *Primer* (e.g., Christ as Messiah, the Trinity).[3] On the other hand, the *Sefer 'Ezer ha-Emunah*, written in Spanish in Castile and later translated into Hebrew, seems not to have been well known in the lands of the Crown of Aragon, when Eximenis wrote *El Crestià*.[4] Although royal documents at the Archives of the Crown of Aragon attest to objections against anti-Christian works and debates by Jews, neither Moses ha-Kohen nor his work *'Ezer ha-Emunah* is cited in the documents known to Rubió i Lluch.[5] However, throughout his chapters on Judaism Eximenis makes references to a certain "Rabbi Moises," which call to mind the names of both Pedro Alfonso and Maimonides.[6] Although medieval authors referred to both authors as "Rabbi Moses," Eximenis reserved this name primarily for Maimonides, a practice derived from Ramon Martí's *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et judeos* and other polemical and apologetic works.[7]

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[3] Yehuda Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-kohen of Tordesillas and His Book 'Ezer ha-Emunah* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 45- 54, 72-74.

[4] Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-kohen of Tordesillas*, 17.

[5] Antoni Rubió y Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-eval*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1921), 2:219, 284.

[6] Although Maimonides never made his living as a rabbi, he was commonly called rabbi by medieval Christian writers. Among those who refer to him as "Rabbi Moyses" are Nicholas of Lyra, Alexander of Hales (*Summa Theologica*), Thomas Aquinas (*Quaestio disputata, De veritate*, q. 14, art. 10); (*Summa Theologica*, part 1, q. 74, art. 3); Albertus Magnus (*De Causis Processu Universitatis*, 1, treatise 14, chap. 8) and Robert Grosseteste. Catalan documents and writers of the time often referred to him as "rabbi Mosse" or "rabbi Mosse de Egipte." The same is true in medieval Spanish texts, according to Norman Roth, *Maimonides, Essays and Texts, 850th Anniversary* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1985), 144, 147. In the first Spanish translation of the *Moreh Nevukhim*, Maimonides is referred to as the "sabio Maestre, Moyse de Egipto," according to Deborah Rosenblatt, "*Mostrador e enseñador de los turbados*: The First Spanish Translation of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*," in *Studies in Honor of M. J. Benardete*, ed. Izaak A. Langnas and Barton Sholod (New York: Las Americas, 1965), 48. Outside of Spain Bernard Gui used "Moses the Egyptian" to refer to Maimonides; see Salo W. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews: Late Middle Ages and Era of European Expansion, 1200-1265* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 9:68. On Pedro Alfonso's title of "Rabbi Moses," see John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 104, 107; Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-kohen of Tordesillas*, 48. In the *Primer*, chap. 369, Eximenis cited the *Moreh Nevukhim*, as "Libre appellat de Endreaments," while in his *Vita Christi*, treatise 4, he stated that Maimonides insisted that circumcision take place within twenty days after birth; in this same work, treatise 10, again he quoted an opinion of Maimonides: it would take a man 7,000 years to walk from earth to heaven if it were possible.

[7] Raymundi Martini, *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et judaeos* (Leipzig: Typis Viduae Johannis

The first mention of Maimonides in relation to the *Primer* appears in a study by J.H. Probst, in which this scholar maintains that "la longue polémique du *Primer del Crestià* est une discussion avec des interlocuteurs juifs imaginaires."[8] Eiximenis mentioned the *Moreh Nevukhim* (*Guide of the Perplexed*) in the *Primer*, especially in his discussion of the names of God (*Primer*, chaps. 369-70). His knowledge of the *Moreh Nevukhim*, however, appears to come from the *Pugio fidei*, especially chapters 685-91.[9] The author of this Latin work, for his part, also interspersed his discussion of the Tetragammaton with material from Pedro Alfonso's *Dialogues*, describing him as "Magister Petrus Alphonsi, qui fuit in Hispania priusquam fieret Christianus, magnus Rabinus apud Judaeos."[10]

In *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* Yitzhak Baer included a footnote worthy of quoting here:

> During my stay in Barcelona, I managed to glance briefly at the first part of Francesc's treatise *Primer del Crestià*; it is full of polemical attacks against the Jewish religion. Francesc refers to the book *Pugio Fidei*, to the *Guide for the Perplexed* and the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides and to several oral discussions with "a great Jewish rabbi." In his book *Kelimath ha-Goyim* ("The Shame of the Gentiles"), Profet Duran writes (*hazofeh*, IV, p. 40): "Such was the answer I made to a certain gentile scholar by the name of Buan [?], who came to me En Filis [?] and told me," etc. Is it possible this is a mistaken reference to Francesc Eiximenis?[11]

Baer's quotation is significant for at least two reasons. He is one of the few scholars and perhaps the only Jewish scholar to write on these

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Willigav, 1687). I have consulted the reprint (Farnborough, England: Gregg Press, 1967), and have cited references to this book in my text.

[8] "Francesch Eximeniç, ses idées politiques et sociales," *Revue Hispanique*, 39 (1917), 1-82 (2).

[9] Ramon Martí cited Maimonides more than one hundred times in the *Pugio fidei*; "Adnotationes ad Raymundi Martini *Pugionem Fidei*," *Bibliothecae Hebraeae*, ed. Johann Christoph Wolf (Hamburg/Leipzig, 1733). I consulted the reprint (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1967), 4:572-639. See also David J. Viera, "The Names of God in the Catalan Works of Francesc Eiximenis," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 61 (1994), 42-53.

[10] *Pugio fidei*, 685.

[11] Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schiffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961-66), 2:467. Both Probst and Baer took chapters 108-16 of the *Primer* as a debate between Eiximenis and a great rabbi. However, a close reading of the exchange reveals that Eiximenis must have been contesting a written text. There is no indication that an actual dialogue is taking place. Chapter 117, for example begins, "I see that this Jew makes other arguments against our Savior" ("Moltes altres raons *veig* [my italics] que fa aquest jueu contra lo nostre Salvador"). To me the word *veig* (I see) indicates that Eiximenis is commenting on a written work. However, his written source may have been in a dialogue form, which was very common in Jewish and Christian polemical works of the Middle Ages.

polemical chapters of the *Primer*. He also noticed the influence of the *Mishneh Torah* and suggested a possible meeting between Eximenis and Profiat (or Profayt) Duran. These two men may have met and discussed religious issues, since both were in eastern Iberia prior to 1391 and both were in the service of Joan I when Profiat Duran left for Perpignan. However, Eximenis's aversion for religious disputations and his move to Valencia in 1383 may rule out such a meeting.

It is uncertain whether Eximenis read Hebrew and Arabic. Perhaps he had a rudimentary knowledge of each language.[12] However, in a document from 14 March 1383, Pere IV of Aragon, the father and predecessor of Joan I, ordered the Jews of Barcelona, Girona, and Perpignan to prepare a precise translation of the *Mishneh Torah*, warning the Jews that failure to produce a prompt translation, which was to be delivered to him in a sealed packet, would cost them his favor and protection. Baer theorized that the king's demand came about "by some defamation of the Jewish law in general or the works of Maimonides in particular."[13] Given the protection Pere subsequently gave the Jews, they must have produced a translation. However, we do not know whether Eximenis actually saw the translation having already written the *Primer*.

The works of Maimonides are mentioned again in May 1391, two weeks before the beginning of the 1391 pogrom. The archbishop of Tarragona put on trial several books by "Rabbi Mosse," whom Baer identified as Maimonides, because they contained "several errors concerning Christianity."[14] The brother and successor of Joan, Martí I, then proposed bringing Maimonides' writings to trial in Barcelona. At this point Queen Violant de Bar, who sympathized with the Jews, stepped in and insisted that the trial of Rabbi Moses' works take place in another location within which there was no Jewish quarter that came under the jurisdiction of the royal treasury. She went on to say that to try Maimonides' writings in Barcelona would produce scandal, for the people of this city hated the Jews.[15]

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[12] Albert G. Hauf, *D'Eximenis a sor Isabel de Villena* (Barcelona: Institut de Filologia Valenciana/Abadia de Montserrat, 1990), 74-75; David J. Viera, "Francesc Eximenis, O.F.M., y la lengua hebrea," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconense*, 51-52 (1978-79), 151-53.

[13] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2:90-91; Rubió y Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-eval* 1:309, 338.

[14] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2:94.

[15] Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie, 1929-36), 1:649-50.

The books of Maimonides and especially the *Mishneh Torah*, however, had come under attack more than a century before in the kingdom of Aragon. Instigated by Dominicans, Jaume I of Aragon (1213-76) confiscated from his kingdom all books of the *Mishneh Torah* known as the *Soffrim*, which scholars identify with "Shophetim," Book XIV or the *Hilkhot Melakhim* (*Book of Judges*), because of its blasphemy against Jesus.[16] These books, according to José Amador de los Ríos, were burned.[17]

In his discussion of the Messiah in the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, Maimonides implied that Jesus is not the Messiah and described the Messiah to come as a king and descendant of David, who would restore Israel's sovereignty and bring peace. He neither directly attacked Jesus nor Christianity in the chapters of the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, which must have been the most objectionable part of the *Mishneh Torah*, for Ramon Martí,[18] Eximenis, the Catalan clergy, and the kings of Aragon. Why did these men oppose the content of *Hilkhot Melakhim*, especially the treatise, "Kings and Wars"? What is the basis of Queen Violant's implication and fear that to expose their teachings would result in anti-Jewish riots? Since documents of the time fail to answer these questions, I turn to the anti-Jewish chapters of the *Primer* for a response. Catalan royalty supported Eximenis, one of the leading theologians of the kingdom of Aragon. Pere IV (1336-87) and his family gave him financial support and recommendations in his studies for a Master's degree in theology.[19] In 1383 Eximenis became the confessor of Joan I (1387-95), a champion of the *jurats*, the governing body of Valencia, and later counselor to Maria de Luna (1396-1406), who ruled the kingdom during the absence of her spouse Martí I (1395-1410). After the 1391 pogrom in the realms of Aragon, Joan I appointed Eximenis and two other Franciscans to examine the Hebrew books, some owned by members of the royal household, such as Ḥasdai Crescas, the court astrologer. Therefore, Eximenis's reaction to Maimonides' works surely would have reflected the feelings of Christians within the kingdom. It is clear from the sources he utilized for the *Primer* that Eximenis depended on Latin works in the genre *adversus Judaeos* for

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[16] Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 81.

[17] José Amador de los Ríos, *Historia social, política y religiosa de los judios de España y Portugal*, 2 vols. (1875; reprint Madrid: Aguilar, 1960), 233; Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:155-56; Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics Against Christianity in France and Spain 1100-1500* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), 27.

[18] *Pugio fidei*, 872-73.

[19] David J. Viera, "Francesc Eximenis and the Royal House of Aragon," *Catalan Review*, 3 (1989), 183-89.

knowledge of Judaism and Jewish opinions on Jesus and Christianity, along with patristic authors whose ideas appeared in commentaries he preferred to consult. Although he did not give the source(s) of chapters 108-16 of the *Primer*, he did include the following words at the end of chapter 370 ("On the names of God"):

> It is true all that I have said, which is taken from very famous and notable persons, such as the *Postilla* of Master Nicholas of Lyra, a Franciscan, in chapter [?] of Exodus, and the commentary by Ponç Carbonell, a Franciscan, concerning this same place where they cited the authority in Latin and Hebrew. And they cite here also the authority of Rabbi Moses, a Jew and a great master of Hebrew.[20]

Eximenis did not have the *Mishneh Torah* before him when he wrote the chapters condemning the "great rabbi." I believe he consulted the *Pugio fidei* along with works by Nicholas of Lyra, especially the *Responsio ad quedam judaeum ex verbis evangelii Matthaeum* also entitled *Apologia contra judaeum*.[21] Eximenis and King Martí I, who was drawn to religious practices and works, sought after Lyra's works, as royal documents attest.[22] By placing the *Primer* in historical context and alluding to its chapters on Judaism, I will attempt to determine which beliefs in Maimonides' works, especially the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, had upset kings, the clergy, and Christians in general in the thirteenth and fourteenth-century lands of the Crown of Aragon.

Maimonides believed that the Messiah would be a human being and an instrument of God. A descendant of the house of David, he would rule in the fear of God, bring about world peace, and would save humankind. He would also be a righteous man endowed with physical and spiritual perfection, and would redeem Israel from political oppression and economic disaster. From the beginning of his polemic (chap. 108), Eximenis objected to the "great rabbi's" most serious charges: first, Jesus had no power to make laws or doctrine; and second, anything good about Christianity does not come from Jesus. Maimonides did not specifically make these charges in the *Hilkhot Melakhim*. However, Eximenis may have inferred his opinion from Maimonides' belief that Jesus "was instrumental in changing the Torah and causing the world

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[20] *Primer del Crestiá*, chap. 370. All translations from the *Primer*, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

[21] See my forthcoming article in the proceedings, being edited by Steven McMichael and Larry J. Simon, of the conference, "The Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," St. Louis University (October 26-28, 1997).

[22] Rubió y Lluch, *Documents* 1:435; 2:381, 423.

to err and serve another besides God."[23] On the other hand, Eiximenis's source could have come from a commentary whose primary source is the *Iggeret Teman*, in which Maimonides states: "his purpose was to interpret the Torah in a fashion that would lead to its total annulment, to the abolition of its commandments, and to the violation of all its prohibitions."[24]

In chapter 109 Eiximenis began his defense of Jesus by arguing against Maimonides' idea of the Messiah in *Sefer Soffrim*, who was a descendant of David and who would achieve the final salvation of Israel.[25] Specifically, he objected to three characteristics of the Messiah: he would descend from noble lineage; be born in an honorable place; and become a powerful and wealthy person. In the next chapter (110) the Catalan Franciscan argued that Jesus came from noble lineage as Mary was a descendant of David. He added, however, that David, like other great leaders, including popes and Muḥammad himself, descended from humble origin.

To my knowledge Maimonides did not predict where the Messiah would be born, although he associated the Messiah with Palestine in both the *Mishneh Torah* and *Iggeret Teman*. Yet Eiximenis spent a good part of chapter 109 contesting the belief that Nazareth was a contemptible place. The term Nazarene, as used in parts of the New Testament, may have bothered Eiximenis, who cited Isaiah 3, probably confusing Isaiah 53:2-4 with John 1:46, in which the people of Nazareth are not regarded with high esteem.[26] To the third objection, that the Messiah would be powerful and rich, Eiximenis or the commentary he used may have misconstrued the passage in *Iggeret Teman* that prophecy is only given to one who is wise, mighty, and rich. However, Maimonides equated might with self-control and wealth with knowledge, whereas Eiximenis argued that virtue and good conscience exceed might and wealth in a good king. In chapters 109 and 112 Eiximenis described one of the severest accusations the "great rabbi" made against Jesus: that he was ignoble and contemptible. Eiximenis's asser-

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[23] *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, ed. Abraham Halkin and David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 137. The argument that Jesus gave no law persisted in Jewish religious polemics, for example, in Isaac ben Abraham Troki's *Hizzuk Emunah*, 1:20.

[24] *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 98.

[25] This type of defense against the "Shophetim" also formed part of the *Pugio Fidei*, 766, chap. 90.

[26] *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 3:524-26. George Foot Moore, "Nazarene and Nazareth," *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. E.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:426-32, contests the existence of the "biblical" Nazareth.

tion here may have been motivated by Maimonides' identification of Jesus as "a wicked and heretical Jew"[27] (Daniel 11:14), and may reflect Maimonides' inference (*Sefer Soffrim*) and opinion (*Iggeret Teman*) that Jesus was not of noble lineage.[28] In order to contradict this opinion, Eximenis, following the example of Nicholas of Lyra, cited Josephus's passage in the *Antiquities of the Jews* (book 18, chap. 3, no. 3), which medieval Christian authors often used to prove the divinity of Jesus.[29]

In chapter 114, Eximenis countered other statements presumably made by the great rabbi in which he denied Jesus was the Messiah: that he was crucified and therefore could not be God; that he was born with original sin and therefore had to be baptized by John; and that he broke Jewish law. The first and third points are clearly discussed in *Iggeret Teman* and in the uncensored section of the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 11:4:

> But if he does not meet with full success, or is slain, it is obvious that he is not the Messiah promised in the Torah . . . Even of Jesus of Nazareth who imagined that he was the Messiah but was put to death by the court, Daniel had prophesized, as it is written, "And the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall stumble" (Dan. 11:14). For has there ever been a greater stumbling than this? All the prophets affirmed that the Messiah would redeem Israel, save them, gather their dispersed, and confirm the commandments. But he caused Israel to be destroyed by the sword, their remnant to be dispersed and humiliated. He was instrumental in changing the Torah and causing the world to err and serve another besides God.[30]

Maimonides described the Messiah as a mortal being who would reign many years and establish a hereditary monarchy.[31] This messianic concept contradicted the idea of Jesus put forth in Eximenis's Christology, that is, the Son of God, who existed eternally, an immortal being who took on a human form to save sinners. Maimonides' king Messiah so offended Christians, that in the printed texts of the *Hilkhot Melakhim* that

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[27] *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 124.

[28] *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 98; *The Code of Maimonides*, Book Fourteen: *The Book of Judges*, trans. Abraham M. Hershman (New Haven: Yale University Press), xxii-xxiii; Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 142.

[29] This reference appears at least in two works of Nicholas of Lyra: *Adversus Judaeos*, 279; *Contra quendam Judaeum impugnatorem evangelii secundam Matthaeum*, 193. See also Amador de los Ríos, *Historia social, política y religiosa de los judíos*, 18.

[30] *Commentary on the Mishnah, tractate Sanhedrin*, ed. J. Holzer (New York: Sepher-Herman, 1981), 148.

[31] *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 11:4; *Sefer ha-Maor, hu Perush ha-Mishneh*, 10:1.

survived in the Middle Ages they mutilated the passage in which Maimonides rejects Jesus (11:4) because he did not fulfill the function of the Messiah, described in Jewish tradition and scripture.[32]

Eiximenis, convinced that Jesus' death on the cross signified the salvation of humankind, could not accept the negative interpretation of Jesus' Crucifixion that Maimonides and others held. Instead he contradicted these opinions with the belief that "it is the great glory of Christians that their leader, Jesus Christ, was cruelly killed and did not fear the cross nor any other suffering to defend the faith and restore the common good, that is, that humans would not perish" (*Primer*, chap. 116).

Medieval Christians held Jews responsible for Jesus' death. Some like Eiximenis and his contemporary and acquaintance Vicent Ferrer, regarded the crucifixion and rejection of Jesus as Messiah to be the great "sins" of the Jews. This idea had been reinforced in Spain by the biblical passage in which Jews cried out to Pilate "His Blood be upon our children" (Matt. 27:25), and by legends and beliefs that the Jews of Spain approved and even counseled Jesus' death.[33] Christian authors of anti-Jewish polemics were quick to point out that Maimonides not only held Jews responsible for Jesus' Crucifixion but emphatically approved of their part in his death. Indeed, Maimonides acknowledged this act in his *Iggeret Teman* with the words: "the sages of blessed memory . . . meted out a fitting punishment."[34] Aware of these traditions, Eiximenis at times forcefully attacked the "great rabbi."

The fourth and last issue of the debate or of Eiximenis's Christian sources concerns the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. The belief in the Trinity became a major source of disagreement between medieval Christians and Jews. According to Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jews rejected this Christian concept of the triune God as being incompatible with the principles of God's unity, which even Christians claimed they maintained. This divergence in theology was one of the crucial differences between Judaism and Christianity. It was natural, then, that the debate over the Trinity was a central feature of almost every Jewish anti-

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[32] Jacob I. Dienstag, *Eschatology in Maimonidean Thought* (New York: Ktav, 1983), 147-48, 157.

[33] Cecil Roth, "The Mediaeval Concept of the Jew: A New Interpretation," *Essays and Studies in Memory of Linda R. Miller*, ed. Israel Davidson (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1938), 184; Amador de los Ríos, *Historia social, politica y religiosa de los judíos*, 18.

[34] *Crisis and Leadership. The Epistles of Maimonides*, 98.

Christian polemic work."[35] Also, Eiximenis' contemporaries, such as Ḥasdai Crescas (*Bittul Ikkarei ha-Nozerim*) and Profiat Duran (*Kelimat ha-Goyim*) made Trinitarian doctrine the focal point of their polemical writing against Christianity. The major problem these writers and other Jewish polemicists had with the Trinity was that the idea of three persons in one God seemed to them polytheistic. In the *Moreh Nevukhim* (1:50), Maimonides offered his most direct rejection of the Trinity: "If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many. This resembles what the Christians say: namely, that He is one but also three, and that the three are one."[36]

In chapter 116 of the *Primer*, Eiximenis chastised the great rabbi on three objections which the great Jewish philosopher had to Christianity: "that he states that Jesus Christ taught us to practice idolatry; that we worship a small piece of bread, that is, at the altar during the sacrifice of the Mass; that we worship images and put forth three gods." Maimonides dealt in general with idolatry, declaring that the attitude of Christians of his time toward images and icons was idolatrous. He also believed that Christians were idolaters because of their belief in the Trinity (*Mishneh Torah, tractate Sanhedrin* 7:6,10; *Mishneh Torah, Abodah Zarak*, 9:13). However, he made no attempt to group in one treatise his opposition to Trinitarian belief, the Eucharist, and worship of human images, all of which he opposed.[37]

Eiximenis, on the other hand, who wrote for a lay audience, avoided speculative discussions of the positive attributes of God and two subjects Maimonides elaborated upon in the *Moreh Nevukhim* (1:50 ff.), the negative attributes and the unity of God. Instead, he approved of Jesus' acceptance of death on the cross, stating that Jesus did a noble deed in allowing himself to be crucified. He also added that Jesus preached the belief in one God and briefly defended the Eucharist, stating that Christ's body, not an image, is contained in the small portion of bread.

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[35] *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 46.

[36] *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 111.

[37] Christian writers opposed Maimonides' treatment of the Trinity on several grounds. Isaac Husik describes an example of a direct attack on the Maimonidean concept of God in "An Anonymous Medieval Christian Critic of Maimonides," *Maimonides: Selected Essays*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 174-80.

In addition, religious images, according to the Franciscan, inspire devotion in the laity, who worship not the statue itself but the person whom the statue represents. Lastly, Eiximenis retaliated against the great rabbi's criticisms insisting that Old Testament Jews were terrible idolaters.

It is obvious again that Eiximenis's criticism of the great rabbi was not inspired by a direct reading of the works of the Jewish philosopher, but by secondary sources. In fact, the Franciscan mentioned a treatise titled *Ydolatria e judeus.*[38] Had Eiximenis read the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Commentary on the Mishneh* (*Sefer ha-Maor, hu Perush ha-Mishneh*), he would have come upon specific Maimonidean opinions that contradicted Catholic thought of his age. The first is the belief that the Messiah would not have to perform miracles, such as resurrect people from the dead.[39] The Davidic concept of the Messiah, of which Maimonides approved, took for granted that the Messiah would be recognized by historical events, that is, he would establish the sovereignty of Israel. God himself was to perform the supreme miracle. Lastly, the whole Christian idea of giving one's wealth to the poor in order to live without extravagance or in poverty was foreign to Maimonides. This practice, preached by Jesus (Luke 18:22) and the mendicant orders, such as Eiximenis's Franciscan order, contradicted an opinion Maimonides wrote in the *Iggeret Teman*: "he who parts with all his money by distributing it to the poor is a fool." The Torah allowed a believer to spend only one-fifth of one's wealth on charity.[40]

Although Maimonides was critical of both Christianity and Islam, the major goal of his writings was not to refute or attack these religions.[41] In addition, his lengthy opus contains relatively few criticisms of Christianity, most of which are based on Jewish and Muslim sources and on his own observation of Christian practices in Spain.[42] At times he even speaks positively about Christians and Gentiles, such as in his statement that it is permissible to inform Christians about the biblical com-

[38] Eiximenis mentioned an anecdote about Pontius Pilate's desire to erect a statue of Jesus after the Crucifixion. The source he gave was Johan Balet. Later in the chapter he cited examples of idolatry from the treatise *Ydolatria e iudeus* by a friar Johan, a Franciscan lector. The two references may be to the same author and treatise. On Johan Balet, consult Fernand Cabrol, "John Beleth," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétiene et de liturgie* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910) 21:649-50.

[39] *The Code of Maimonides*, 14:239; this belief is also found in the *Iggeret Teman*, 126.

[40] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Arakhim*, 8:1; also in the *Iggeret Teman*, ed. Halkin and Hartman, 124.

[41] Ben Zion Bokster, *The Legends of Maimonides* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 67-68.

[42] Baron, *History and Jewish Historians*, 142 n. 382.

mandments because, they, unlike Muslims, accept the revelatory origin of the Torah.[43] He also saw "matters relating to" Jesus and Muḥammad, as serving "to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord," citing Zephaniah 3:9 as his proof.[44]

Why would some Christian writers single out Maimonides as the subject of their attacks against Jewish beliefs on such doctrines as the Trinity and the acceptance of Jesus as the savior? First of all, Maimonides spent much of his life in Islamic countries where he had "few direct contacts with Christians."[45] Therefore, he was more inclined to react negatively toward beliefs such as the Trinity and Jesus as Messiah than other Jewish philosophers, such as Saadiah Gaon (*Sefer ha-Emunot ve-De'ot*), who had more contact with Christians.[46] That Maimonides should be the target of criticism for Christian authors writing *adversus Judaeos* works is no wonder. As Amador de los Ríos pointed out, Christians tried to combat the Talmud, which Maimonides had "canonized" years before.[47] In addition, Maimonides also became the source and inspiration for Jewish polemicists. Authors such as Profiat Duran, Moses ben Solomon of Salerno, Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne, and Joseph Albo, among others, used the *Moreh Nevukhim* as a springboard for their criticism of the Trinity. Other Jewish polemicists followed Maimonidean philosophical opinions and commented on his works.[48] On the other hand, some Jewish writers, including contemporaries of Eiximenis, did not hesitate to criticize his philosophy.[49]

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[43] Abraham Joshua Herschel, *Maimonides: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 56-57. Isadore Twersky, editor of *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 190, states that Maimonides, in the uncensored version of *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 11:4, accorded Islam and Christianity a positive role in history.

[44] *A Maimonides Reader*, 226-27.

[45] Robert Gordis, *The Root and the Branch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 50.

[46] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 64-65, 205.

[47] Amador de los Ríos, *Historia social, política y religiosa de los judíos*, 883; see also Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 33, on the influence of Maimonides' distinction between logical and natural impossibilities on Jewish-Christian polemics.

[48] The writings of Maimonides were also venerated in southern France according to Heinrich Gractz, *History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1902), 3:489-90, 526 ff. Also see Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, *Historia de la filosofía española (Siglos VIII-XII, Judíos)* (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1911), 2:396-99. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 46-47.

[49] Among these were Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne (d. 1362) and Issac ben Sheshet Barfat (Ribash) (1326-1408), whose dates correspond closely to those of Eiximenis. The Catalan Franciscan may have personally known Profiat Duran (c. 1345-1414) (*Kelimat ha-Goyim*) (1397) and Ḥasdai Crescas (c. 1340-c. 1412) (*Biṭṭul Ikkarei ha-Nozerim*), which survives in a Hebrew translation, 1451. Also see Bonilla y San Martín, *Historia de la*

Eiximenis, however, saw his own role as one of bringing to laypersons of Mediterranean Spain the knowledge compiled by medieval Christian writers, especially those of his Franciscan order. Also, his reliance on Christian philosophers and theologians of his time concerning Judaism and Jewish philosophical speculation may be due to a lack of fluency in Hebrew as well as Arabic. Therefore he relied directly and indirectly on Christian authors who knew Hebrew: Nicholas of Lyra, and Ramon Martí, among others.

I have drawn a number of conclusions from the analysis of Eiximenis' chapters 108-16 and 369-70 of the *Primer*. The Franciscan used Latin works and commentaries that cited the "great rabbi" and "Rabbi Moses," a title he used to refer to Maimonides. These include the *Pugio fidei*, the Bible commentaries and apologetic treatises by Nicholas of Lyra, Ponç Carbonell, and others.[50] However, the sources he used or his interpretation of them do not fully correspond in many instances with Maimonidean thought. Either Eiximenis indiscriminately used the title "gran rabbi Moises" or was led by his sources to attribute references to Maimonides. In the case of chapters 108-16, one of the sources may well be the *Responsio* by Lyra, a treatise whose main ideas can be traced to Jacob ben Reuben and his *Milḥamot ha-Shem*.[51] In chapters 369-70 of the *Primer*, the Catalan Franciscan consulted the *Pugio fidei* or a commentary on this source that mentions Maimonides and contains material from Pedro Alfonso's *Dialogues*, and perhaps other commentaries on the names of God.

Members of the Catalan clergy and monarchs, such as Jaume I and Pere IV, who commissioned Eiximenis to write *El Crestià* as a medieval Christian encyclopedia in the manner of Vincent de Beauvais' works, were aware of the controversial chapter of the *Hilkhot Melakhim*. Two years after Eiximenis completed the *Primer* Pere insisted that Jews of his kingdoms produce a prompt and accurate translation of the *Mishneh Torah*, perhaps because of the controversial chapter of the *Hilkhot Melakhim*, which again came under attack by the Catalan royal family and clergy during the 1391 pogroms in Barcelona and throughout Spain.

J.H. Probst and Yitzhak Baer assumed correctly that Eiximenis wrote the apologetic and polemical chapters of the *Primer* against Judaism,

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filosofia española, 2:400-402; and J.S. Teicher, "Christian Theology and Jewish Opposition to Maimonides," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 43 (1942), 68-76.

[50] On Ponç Carbonell, see *Biblioteca bíblica ibérica medieval*, ed. Klaus Reinhardt and Horacio Santiago-Otero (Madrid: CSIC, 1986), 284-93.

[51] See note 21.

especially chapters 108-16, specifically to counter the works of Maimonides. His works did affect these chapters, but not in the sense that Eiximenis relied on primary texts of, or even secondary sources containing, Rabbi Moses' writings. The influence consists rather in the preoccupation and urgent need to rebuke any objections to Jesus' identification as the Messiah and his divinity. And it was precisely Maimonides whom the Catalan clergy, royal family, and educated Christians held responsible for negating Jesus as Savior in the *Mishneh Torah.* To this end Eiximenis directed chapters 108-16, among the most assertive of the *Primer,* to neutralize arguments of the great Jewish rabbi and offering proofs to lay readers and clerics that Jesus was both Messiah and God.